

**Forum:** General Assembly 1 (GA1)

**Issue:** *Combating Transnational Trade in Opiates*

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**Position:** *Chair*

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## Introduction

From an ancient anesthetic to a modern drug, opiates have had a lasting effect on humanity. In light of the recent US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the resurgence of the Taliban, a renewed focus has been placed on the role of opiates in the failure of the 20-year long war in Afghanistan and how insurgencies like the Taliban have actively used it to destabilize regions. In addition to funding insurgencies and transnational criminal organizations, opiates have a drastic impact on the societies in which they are introduced. Not only is there a significant security threat due to the level of trafficking that occurs as a result of the opiate trade, but also a significant health crisis, with nearly three times as many deaths resulting from Heroin overdoses each year than the number of Nato troops killed in Afghanistan throughout the 20-year war.

In order to formulate an effective response, a variety of different policies are required in order to reduce the impact on societies. The production, demand, and trafficking of opiates across borders are all variables that need to be considered. If one of these factors remains insufficiently addressed, results seen by other policies would be eclipsed by the shortcomings of the former. For example, without a simultaneous decrease in both production and demand, ignoring the constant demand would result in the introduction of replacement drugs. Similarly, if production is ignored, opiates would be just as easily accessible and lead to increased levels of consumption.

Indeed, strengthening controls on one source of opioids will only hide the problem from one perspective without substantial changes to societies. The global opioid epidemic serves as another significant destabilizing threat to the security of many regions. Different extremist groups and criminal factions such as the Taliban are also prone to exploiting the international demand for opioids. While addressing different facets of the international opiate trade, it is also important to understand that drug abuse is a treatable illness.

## Definition of Key Terms

### **Opiates**

Opiates are plant-based derivatives made from extracted poppy sap and fibers.. Examples of opiates include Opium, Morphine, Codeine, Heroin. The term “opiates” is often used interchangeably with the term “opioids”. However, opioids is an umbrella term that encompasses a broad range of narcotic substances, both synthetic and naturally derived. The topic addressed within this report places a greater focus on the latter, although practices for mitigation generally overlap.

### **Illicit Substances**

Illicit substances cover a broad range of illegal substances that have varied effects. These substances usually inhibit or stimulate the central nervous system or cause hallucinogenic effects. Opioids are among the many kinds of illicit substances that are highly regulated by most governments around the world.

### **Drug Trafficking**

Drug trafficking encompasses the entire process of cultivation, manufacture, and marketing of illicit drugs.

### **Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs)**

Transnational criminal organizations are associations that operate through illegal means irrespective of geography. While TCOs have many different structures and hierarchies, such organizations often share similar characteristics such as being insular, corrupt, and exploitative of regional power structures.

### **Money Laundering**

Money laundering is an illegal process in which criminal organizations make large amounts of money appear to have come from a legitimate source.

### **War on Drugs**

The war on drugs is a US-led global campaign of aggressive drug prohibition and military intervention, with the aim of reducing the illegal drug trade in the US and its allied nations. The consequences of the campaign have been highly contentious with the Global Commission on Drug Policy declaring “the global war on drugs has failed”.

## Background Information

### Sources of Opiates:

Opiates are plant-based derivatives made from extracted poppy sap and fibers. This means that production is limited by the amount of land that is available to grow poppy plants. This generally means large-scale production of opiates is restricted to places with warmer climates.

#### South West Asia

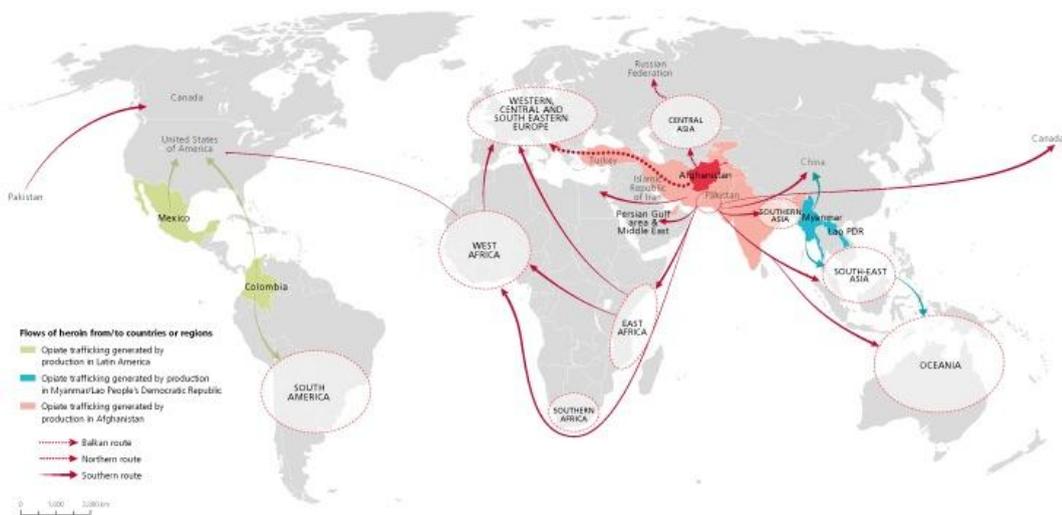
Afghanistan is currently the country that produces the largest amount of opium. The country accounts for an estimated 83 percent of the global opium production over the past five years, supplying markets in neighboring countries and in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. A small proportion of the opium supplies markets in North America and Oceania.

#### Southeast Asia

Of the opium producing countries in South-East Asia, Myanmar accounting for 7 percent of global opium production and the Lao People's Democratic Republic about 1 percent of global opium production. These countries mostly supply markets in East and South-East Asia and Oceania.

#### Latin America

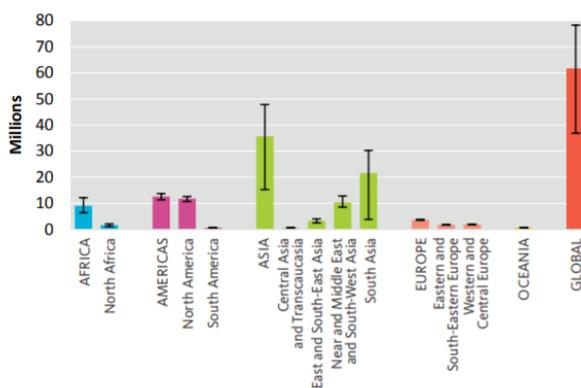
Of the opium producing countries in Latin America, Mexico accounted for the most, with 6 percent of global opium production while Colombia and Guatemala each produced less than 1 percent of the global total. These countries supplied most of the heroin produced to the United States and the relatively limited heroin markets of South America.



## Opium Use

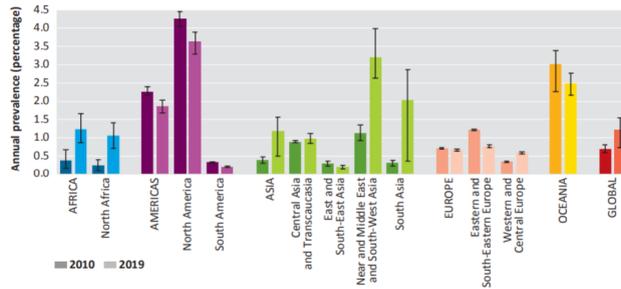
Opiate demand varies from region to region and is determined by a multitude of factors ranging from societal perception to the accessibility of opioids. Nearly 62 million people were estimated to be past-year users of opioids in 2019, including people who use opiates and people who use pharmaceutical opioids for non-medical purposes. About half, or 31 million, of all Opioid users, had used opiates such as heroin and opium in the past year. The estimated number of opioid users worldwide nearly doubled between 2010 and 2019, increasing from 31 million to around 62 million users. However, this can be partially attributed to the availability of more accurate and recent estimates of Opioid consumption in Asian and African nations

FIG. 42 People who use opioids, by region and subregion, 2019



UNODC estimates, based on responses to the annual report questionnaire.

FIG. 41 Opioid use, by region and subregion, 2010 and 2019



Source: UNODC estimates, based on responses to the annual report questionnaire.

Note: Opioids include opiates and synthetic opioids, including pharmaceutical opioids used for non-medical purposes. The prevalence of opioid use for 2010 and 2019 are the best estimate based on the available data for those years and should be interpreted with caution, considering the data caveats and the limited availability of data in a given year.

## Differences between global regions

Different global regions have experienced different trends in opioid use in the past 10 years. Africa and Asia saw the most dramatic increases in the amount of opioid use. In these regions, especially South Asia, heroin and other opiates are the dominant forms of misused opioids. In Asia, proximity to opiate sources such as Afghanistan positively correlated to the level of opiate consumption. This can be seen in China, where heroin and meth consumption were measured at a higher rate in the southwest than that seen further north and east. The largest opiate consuming The Americas and Europe experience a stabilizing level of opiate consumption, yet overdose deaths continue to rise as synthetic opioids become much more widely available.

## Differences between specific demographics

People from different socioeconomic backgrounds also experience varying levels of non-medical opioid consumption. In a study of the United States, much more men consume opioids compared to women. The same can be seen for Native Americans who consume much more compared to other ethnicities. People who did not graduate from college or were unemployed were also much more likely to misuse opioids.

## Effects of Opioids

Opioids encompass a broad range of substances that have varying levels of purity and potency. Opioids are incredibly effective narcotics, which induce drowsiness and numb pain while increasing the feelings of pleasure. However, there are significant risks to the misuse of opioids: addiction and overdoses. Repeated usage of opioids can lead to dependency on opioids and cause significant damage to interpersonal relations. Overdoses

are also a significant risk factor as high doses can significantly slow people's metabolism and even lead to death. Especially with the introduction of the much more potent synthetic opioids into markets around the world, the number of deaths as a direct result of overdoses has risen dramatically over the past few years.

## **Key Issues**

### **Supply-Demand Dynamics,**

In addition, the use of a drug is to a large extent related to the availability of the drug more than to an individual's preference to use or misuse a particular substance. An increase in the price of one drug may result in substitution for another. In places like Australia, the substitution between synthetic and non-synthetic opioids was widely prevalent amongst opioid users. In places like Finland and Estonia, a shortage in opiates and an introduction of synthetic opioids have led to the complete replacement of the heroin market.

### **Trafficking routes:**

To supply the demand for opiates around the world, traffickers have established several routes. With several

### **Contextual obstacles**

#### ***Afghanistan***

Afghanistan's difficult political, economic and security environment limits the international community's ability to counter drug production and trafficking. Afghanistan, a historically significant source of opiates, saw a boom in opiate production following the removal of the Taliban in 2001, now accounting for more than 85 percent of the current global opiate trade. With the resurgence of the Taliban in 2021, uncertainty in the region has driven up opium prices, further incentivizing the cultivation of poppies.

The situation in Afghanistan creates several concerns about the future of opiate production in the country. Although the Taliban claims that they aim to eliminate poppy production, the illicit drug trade in opiates still serves as a significant source of their income (up to 60% of their annual revenue). In addition to the political motivations, poverty is another key motivation for poppy cultivation. Even before the

recent political turmoil, the Afghan government and many western actors were plagued with corruption, opting to cash in on the lucrative drug trade.

### ***Mexico***

Mexico is the 3rd largest producer of opium in the world and is well known for the transnational drug trafficking operations run by cartel groups. The Sinaloa Cartel, in particular, holds a monopoly on the US heroin market. Many of these cartel groups control large amounts of territory and abuse corrupt local governments. They hold significant influence over the regions they operate in and are present in almost 60% of the countries in the world.

## **Financing of Terrorism and Corruption**

### ***Extremism/Terrorism***

Terrorists and other extremist groups often have a close connection to the international drug trade due to their illicit nature. Extremist groups like the Taliban are known to be linked to organizations like al Qaeda, such as the hosting of Osama bin Laden. Al Qaeda in turn is suspected to have been facilitating the trafficking of illicit substances across the world. Lots of other Central Asian extremist and militant organizations fund themselves by actively supporting the drug trade through the destabilization of areas with key trafficking routes. The lure of money and the opportunity to destabilize societies they sell the drugs create a big incentive for such organizations to participate.

### ***Corruption***

Corruption is a key tool that drug traffickers use to survive and successfully deliver illicit substances to different markets. Corruption is often symptomatic of a weakened political system in which those in power cannot survive without the backing of an external force. The entire chain of illegal drug trafficking which involves international or cross-border activities often involves many types of intermediaries from the military, police, officials, border and customs agents, to illegal armed actors and organized criminal groups. Because data on both illicit drugs and corruption are scarce, connections between the two are not always objective. However, what remains true is there exists a connection between corruption and the prevalence of drugs.

## ***Efficacy and results of the War on Drugs***

The War on Drugs yielded mixed results and has largely been considered to be a failure. Not only did the War on Drugs fail to eradicate the global drug trade with the trillion dollars spent by the US, but the impacts of rhetoric and policies have also had adverse effects on those they were intended to help. The failure of the war has even ushered in a new wave of opioid abuse in the form of pharmaceutical opioids, which were considered safer than heroin, as they were less affected by fluctuations in quality or dosage and did not carry the stigma of using an “illicit” drug.

Ignoring the vast destabilizing social impacts on individuals and communities in the US and around the world, the War on Drugs has also fueled a new generation of antagonistic sentiments across the world; anti-muslim rhetoric has become more and more mainstream across the western world in recent decades while the anti-western rhetoric continues to fester across regions that are attacked by western led forces. Rhetoric has become extremely effective in garnering support for many extremist groups, leading to further destabilization and undermining of previous efforts. Especially with the rising controversy over the use of drones and the frequent news about civilian casualties all while seeing little to no impact on measurable impact on the illicit drug trade, the War on Drugs was ultimately unable to achieve its initial goal and instead created setbacks in affected regions for decades to come.

## **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

### **USA**

The United States is the country leading the global campaign against the drug trade and has dedicated the most resources into its efforts internationally. The US is also one of the biggest markets for illicit drugs. The US receives most of its opiates from Mexico and South America. The US has also faced scrutiny for many of its past failures to manage the drug trade. With the recent failure in Afghanistan, public perception has shifted slightly to be more reserved when it comes to the US’s international involvement in another campaigns. However, the US remains committed to continue to fight transnational organized criminal groups.

### **European Union**

As another major destination for the international drug trade, the EU is a key bloc in combatting drug routes across Europe as well as the Mediteranean. With open borders between member nations, the drug trafficking becomes harder to regulate within the EU. The

EU adopts more of a social campaign within its borders while pursuing diplomatic solutions to reduce instability in neighboring regions.

### ***Afghanistan***

Afghanistan is currently represented in the UN by the ousted Afghan government, despite not actually having control in Afghanistan. However, the situation poses a dilemma. Millions of Afghans are face acute food insecurity, yet it becomes increasingly difficult to provide aid without recognition of the Taliban. This further complicates other issues such as the international response to the opiate trade. In the short run, cooperation with the Taliban seems unlikely and diplomacy with the representative diplomats hold little to no practical effect.

### ***Iran***

Iran continues to be the country reporting the largest quantity of opiates seized, accounting for more than 50% of the total seized internationally. With passing Iran being a key route for the international drug trade from Afghanistan to Europe, the cooperation with Iran in reducing the flow of drugs is critical. Iran is currently committed to the stemming of the illicit drug trade, having built one of the strongest counter-narcotics enforcement capabilities over the years.

### ***Pakistan***

Like Iran, Pakistan is another key transit nation for illicit drugs to enter foreign markets. Pakistan has historically pursued policies of zero tolerance with regards to drugs, whether its proliferation or cultivation. To deal with the issue of drugs, Pakistan has numerous law enforcement agencies among other pieces of infrastructure that attempt to limit the flow of drugs through the nation. However, the nationl also faces its own problems with a measured rise in drug use as well as relatively widespread corruption.

### ***Mexico***

Mexico is the key transit nation for the flow of illicit drugs from South America into the US and Canada. It is also the most significant source of illicit drugs in the Americas. Mexican cartels are also powerful organizations with a broad range of control in Mexico and influence abroad. The Mexican government faces an uphill battle when it comes to combating these transnational criminal organizations and have all but entered a state of mitigation, trying to reduce the scale of conflicts between rival organizations. While recent Mexican administrations have attempted to quell the influence of these cartels, they have mostly only

spurred more violence. Although there has been a shift from crackdowns to a more socio-economic revamp oriented policy, homicide rates remain at an all time high.

### **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime(UNODC)**

The UNODC is the largest and most comprehensive transnational entity dedicated to aid countries in addressing issues of drugs, organized crime, corruption and terrorism. The UNODC provides practical assistance and serves as a platform for international cooperation. The Office also recognizes health-oriented responses to drug use and fair, effective and humane justice systems, as fundamental enablers for sustainable development as listed in the 2030 sustainable development goal agenda.

## **Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of event</b>
	<b>International Opium Convention</b>
January 23, 1912	The International Opium Convention was the first international drug control treaty. The convention was established as a result of rising criticism of the opium trade and the fallout of the Opium Wars.
	<b>Single Convention on Narcotics Drugs</b>
30 March 1961	The <b>Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs</b> is an international treaty prohibiting the production and supply of narcotics. The Single Convention consolidated prior treaties and broadened their scope to include other substances with effects similar to drugs covered.
	<b>The War on Drugs Begin</b>
June 18, 1971	Coined by US president Richard Nixon in 1971, the war on drugs evolved into an international campaign against the proliferation of the drug trade.
	<b>Founding of the UNODC</b>
1997	The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime was founded in 1997 and is the largest and most comprehensive transnational entity dedicated to aid countries in addressing issues of drugs, organized crime, corruption and terrorism.

## **Relevant UN Resolutions**

- Restriction of the cultivation of the poppy, 13 May 1977 (**E/RES/2067(LXII)**)
- International regulation and control of trade in poppy seeds, 1999-07-28 (**E/RES/1999/32**)
- Eradication of illicit crops in the area covered by the Sub-Commission on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East, 1990-03-19 (**E/CN.7/RES/8(S-XI)**)
- The situation in Afghanistan, 2007-11-05 (**A/RES/62/6**)

## Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The controversy over solutions to drug trade is that outcomes of seemingly logical solutions are often counterintuitive when measured objectively. For example, the prohibition of drugs prevents governments from being able to monitor markets and stresses punitive responses over harm reduction. Because drug addiction renders drug demand inelastic, measures to reduce supply lead to the increased prices which are met by more crime. In addition, products are often adulterated to maximize revenue with each constriction, which further increases the public health risk posed to individuals who are victims of the system. Dramatic shifts in purity as a result of inconsistent drug policy as governments change also lead to spikes in the level of overdoses as individuals tend to overestimate the amount of drugs to administer. The social stigma and vilification of drug users that resulted from the War on Drugs also led to the alteration of drug consumption behaviors in individuals. Fearful of arrest, individuals transitioned to injecting drugs, which led to an increased risk of overdoses as well as blood borne diseases.

In addition to the destabilization of societies, the military campaigns of nations against criminal organizations both regionally and abroad have seen limited results. The US war against Opium in Afghanistan with its campaign "Iron Tempest" in 2017 saw catastrophic and exorbitant failures. The campaign sought to replicate strategies used on Syria, using bleeding edge fighter jets to target heavy machinery and riggings used by the Syrian illegal oil industry. However, the targeting of clandestine opium production labs throughout Afghanistan saw little to no results except burn through billions of dollars. Policies prior to 2017 also saw little results, mostly as a result of inconsistencies in policies and the lack of prioritisation of the narcotics industry. The focus on fighting terrorists instead of social reform and eliminating corruption also meant that the industry stayed largely intact through the 20 years of US involvement. Bureaucracy was the ultimate downfall of the fight against drugs in Afghanistan.

## Possible Solutions

While the fight against drugs seems like an unwinnable battle, policies that are informed by objective data and not sentiment can see productive results. The first step is the recognition of the consumption of drugs as a strict public health crisis instead of a criminal action. This encourages individuals to seek help rather than avoid authorities and can most effectively to . There are many approaches to achieving this shift, from investing in public services to the legalization of certain drugs. Each of these solutions come with their own caveats, but are often significantly better than the ineffective, century old approach of cracking down drug abuse.

Here are other possible solutions to consider:

- Linking the international drug agenda and the work of international organizations to illegal drug issues with those focused on corruption.
- Establishing links between the drug-corruption nexus and social problems through further assessments of national performances in order to generate better data on the link between corruption and illicit drug markets.
- Multi-layered coordination between nations and relevant international organizations around shared long term goals and the alignment of counter narcotic strategies between host nations and those assisting them.
- Focusing on structural development in rural areas susceptible to the production of poppy to establish alternative opportunities for farmers to transition away from poppy cultivation.

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## Appendix or Appendices

Please include any materials that you may wish to Appendix in this section. Also, Roman numerals must be used in labelling the different appendices. It is highly recommended that any useful links be placed in this section.

- I. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/afghanistan-war-opium-poppy-production/>
- II. [https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2021/field/WDR21\\_Booklet\\_3.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2021/field/WDR21_Booklet_3.pdf)